

'BRAC is upon us'

Lamar McDonald of Meridian is chairman of the Meridian Military Team and the Mississippi Military Communities Council. He has worked for years to support East Central Mississippi's military missions, from Mississippi National Guardsmen and Reservists to active-duty personnel at Naval Air Station Meridian — Lauderdale County's largest employer.

By Lamar McDonald
special to The Star

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process, commonly called BRAC, is moving rapidly and is upon us.

The Meridian Military Team, formerly known as the Navy Meridian Team, has been active since the 1991 Base Closure Round as we successfully survived the rounds of 1991, 1993 and 1995.

President Bush will name the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure commissioners on March 15. The Department of Defense will publish the recommended realignment and closure list on May 16, and the commission will make its report to the president on Sept. 8.

If we are on the list, we have from May 16 to Sept. 8 to convince the commission to spare our bases.

The Meridian Military Team has been working since the 1995 round to be ready for this 2005 round. Obviously, the main thrust has been to make every effort to avoid being on the closure list.

The Meridian Military Team has been very active and has received great cooperation and

help from the Gov. Haley Barbour, the Mississippi Development Authority, the Mississippi Military Communities Council, our state Legislature, the city of Meridian and Lauderdale County.

We have also received wonderful help and guidance from our congressional delegation — Sens. Thad Cochran and Trent Lott, and U.S. Reps. Chip Pickering, Roger Wicker, Gene Taylor, Bennie Thompson and their effective staffs.

Department of Defense officials have said closing some bases will reduce cost of maintaining what they call "excessive infrastructure." They indicate they will use these perceived savings to purchase new weapon systems and new and different ships, planes and other equipment.

There have been different unauthorized and bogus closure lists published for more than a year. These lists have no merit. There will be no official list until May 16. These bogus lists have been published by people not involved in the process; they have no validity.

Phil Grone, deputy under-secretary of defense for installation and environment, said in a speech Jan. 31 in Tempe, Ariz., that these lists "have no foundation." Grone is the Department of Defense's top BRAC official. He further said, "There is no basis to treat any of them seriously."

The community is applying to the Office of Economic Adjustment, a part of the Department of Defense, for a grant for re-use of the base if that becomes necessary. This is a necessary precaution and was



PHOTO BY FREDIE CARMICHAEL / THE MERIDIAN STAR

SAVING BASES

Lamar McDonald of Meridian sits behind his desk at Meyer & Rosenbaum. McDonald is chairman of the Meridian Military Team and the Mississippi Military Communities Council.

also done in 1995.

The Mississippi Military Communities Council has encouraged the nine communities in Mississippi with military bases to apply for this grant.

Your Meridian Military Team, working with the Missis-

sippi Military Communities Council, our Washington consultant, The Rhoads Group, and our congressional delegation will continue to work hard for Naval Air Station Meridian and the area's Army and Air National Guard units.

THE LATEST ON BRAC

The U.S. Defense Department's next round of Base Realignment and Closure, commonly called BRAC, will soon be under way. Meridian's military installations could be targets for closure. They include: Naval Air Station Meridian; the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing, 238th Air Support Operations Squadron and 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron; and the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer

Battalion and 185th Aviation Group, Company G.

NAS Meridian survived previous BRAC rounds in the early 1990s. The members of the BRAC Commission will be named in March. The Defense Department is expected to release its list of potential bases to be closed May 16. A major Navy base and large Guard unit in Meridian pump millions of dollars annually into the local economy.

ECONOMIC BREAKDOWN

186th Air Refueling Wing
Where: Key Field, Meridian
Branch: Mississippi Air National Guard
Employees
Military: 1,051
Civilian: 75
Annual payroll: \$41.3 million

Naval Air Station Meridian
Where: Northeast Lauderdale County
Branch: U.S. Navy
Employees
Military: 2,120
Civilian: 1,607
Annual payroll: \$90.1 million

Source: Mississippi Military Communities Council

Business profile ...

Southern Star Outdoors

We asked Meridian business owners to fill out questionnaires about themselves and their work. Some questions were serious, some were just for fun.

Shawn Farrar owns Southern Star Outdoors on Highway 19 South. He and his wife, Melissa, have two children, Jordan and Carlee. The family lives in the Clarkdale community and attends New Hope Baptist Church.

By Shawn Farrar
special to The Star

First, the fun

A movie about my life and work would be called "The Great Outdoors" because that's where I spend most of my time. The role of me would be played by Kevin Costner.

My business

- We sell hunting and fishing supplies, guns, ammunition, boots, camouflage apparel, bows, safes, feeders and deer stands.

- How it started? I've hunted and fished all my life, and I've seen the money I've spent over the years. I thought it would be a good idea to get involved in the outdoor sporting goods business.

- No. of employees: Three, with part-time help

What I think

- The best piece of professional advice I ever received was from Johnny and Betty Farrar, who said, "If you put your mind to it, you will accomplish whatever you're doing and make the best of it."

- What I look for in employees is hard work, doing things without being told, and being able to read my mind. The employee who's been with me the longest is Brad Richardson, who manages gun sales.

- The best thing that happened at my business this year was the people of Meridian allowing me to open a sporting goods business to supply them with their hunting and fishing needs. Plus, competition is always good for business — that's what makes running

I CAN'T IMAGINE

- ▶ A day without seeing or talking to my family.
- ▶ A week without making someone satisfied.
- ▶ A year without having God in my life at least 365 days of the year.

your own business fun.

- The biggest challenge my business faces in the coming year is making sure the customers are well-served and having what they need in stock.

A letter from home

- Has Sept. 11 and the U.S. War on Terror changed this country? Yes, it's changed the way people think and live.

- Has it touched my family's life? Yes, it has given us a deeper love for our families and has also strengthened our commitment

to the Lord. It has made me realize how precious life is.

- Do I have employees in the Guard or Reserve? Yes, part-time employee Chase Neal.

- My message for the troops: Thank you for the freedom of our country. You and your families will always be in our prayers, no matter where you are.

The War in Iraq: Justified or not?

Nabeel Siddiqui is a junior at Meridian High School. He was born in Karachi, Pakistan, but his family moved to Meridian before he was 8 years old. His parents are Akhtar and Nadia Siddiqui and he has one brother, Sehban.

His hobbies include playing on the computer, going outside and hanging out with his friends. He plans to pursue a career in computer science.

Nabeel submitted this column for inclusion in "Profile 2005: A Letter from Home" in December. "I wrote on this topic because I felt very strongly about it."

By Nabeel Siddiqui
special to The Star

As the war in Iraq rages on, many people ask me about my opinion of the war. Many think that believing it's not justified is an indication that a person does not support the troops.

I am plagued with questions like, "Do you not want the people in Iraq to be helped?" and "Do you not want democracy to be spread?" and "Can you find a better way to spend money, other than liberating a person's country for him or her?"

Although it is only natural to help people, how we do this affects our standing as a country.

Many people believe the war is helping those who are most in need of it. However, it is impossible to tell if the war is helping or hurting the Iraqis — as the number of people lost increases day by day.

Depending on how you define "civilian," the number of civilian deaths in Iraq varies greatly. The confirmed number is about 14,500 civilian deaths that the United States has a binding responsibility to prevent under the Geneva Convention and Hague Regulations.

These include civilian deaths resulting from the breakdown in law and order, and deaths due to inadequate health care or sanitation. Al Jazeera television claims the number of deaths could be as high as 37,000.

Luckily, the number of soldiers and civilians lost on the coalition side is much smaller, and the people are grateful for this.

Yet, one must wonder what country are we actually helping here? Think how you would feel if your father died right this minute, and think how your life would change. Now, imagine if all of Meridian died, and think of how many people would be affected.

Emerging democracy

People ask me if I'm against the spread of democracy. Although I am not against it, I do not believe a democracy can exist in Iraq.

Historically, Iraq as a democracy or republic has failed. This was the case with the "Republic of Iraq" established in 1959, which brought back the dictatorial rule the Iraqi people tried so hard to free themselves from.

If the United States stays in the country, the forces needed to stop an invasion and keep insurgent under control are tremendous.

However, even if the United States can somehow stop this from occurring, the people of Iraq are not nearly prepared for political extremists, a group barely seen in the United States. These people follow a Malcolm-X-like theory of "by any means necessary." In the United States, this struck fear in people during the fight for equality. In a weakened country, such as Iraq, it is almost guaranteed to succeed.

Financial considerations

But, if we have the money to help the people of Iraq, why not do so? If we do not want to spend it in Iraq, what is a better way to spend it?

The debt from the war in Iraq was predicted to reach \$152 billion dollars by the end of 2004, according to requests made by various organizations and what Congress actually allocated.

This money could have funded the global anti-hunger efforts for the next six years. It could be used to fully fund AIDS programs worldwide for the next 14 years.

For the amount of money the U.S. has spent, every child could have had health care for the next half century — ensuring that our children and theirs would grow up in a world free of the most deadly diseases.

Yet, the money is used to "liberate" a country.

Though the justification for the war may vary from person to person, one idea must stand above all, the troops are what come first. We can moan and cry about how we are not getting our way, but until we take a stand, we have no reason to complain.

Try to make a simple change if possible, a penny, a dollar, a ribbon, but please attempt to help in any way possible. Perhaps Confucius was right when he said, "The superior man ... succeeds in his actions."



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